

## Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2170

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AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

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TAGS: PINT, FR

SUBJECT: THE PR CONVENTION -- A MIXTURE OF BUSINESS  
AND PLEASURE

SUMMARY. THE REPUBLICAN PARTY (PR) HELD ITS CONVENTION IN FREJUS, MAY 20 AND 21, TO CELEBRATE ITS FIRST BIRTHDAY, ELECT JACQUES BLANC TO REPLACE JEAN-PIERRE SOISSON AS SECRETARY GENERAL, AND TO RATIFY THE PR'S ADHESION TO THE NEW UDF STATUTES. THE CONVENTION WAS ALSO NOTABLE FOR (A) THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CLEAR POLITICAL LINKAGE BETWEEN THE PR (AND UDF) WITH PRIME MINISTER BARRE, (B) THE RETURN OF PONIATOWSKI AND (C) EVIDENCE THAT THE PR IS MAKING SOME PROGRESS TOWARD ITS GOAL OF DEVELOPING A MILITANT BASE. END SUMMARY.

1. BIRTHDAY PARTY AND VICTORY CELEBRATION: "VICTORY IN ONE YEAR" WAS THE TITLE OF OUTGOING SECRETARY GENERAL SOISSON'S KEYNOTE SPEECH AND IT SUMMARIZED THE THEME OF THE CONVENTION. CREATED AT FREJUS IN MAY OF 1977, THE REPUBLICAN PARTY NOW CLAIMS 100,000 MEMBERS, HAS DEFINED  
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A NATIONAL PROGRAM (THE REPUBLICAN PROJECT) AND HAS HELPED ELECT 72 DEPUTIES TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (OF WHICH 33 ARE NEW). TRANSFORMED FROM THE FORMER INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN PARTY WITH ITS IMAGE OF A COLLECTION OF LOCAL NOTABLES, THE PR HAS ESTABLISHED ITSELF AS THE PARTY EMBODYING THE PRESIDENT'S REFORMIST AND LIBERAL PROGRAM OUTLINED IN HIS BOOK DEMOCRATIE FRANCAISE. IN

ADDITION, IT HAS SERVED AS MIDWIFE TO THE UDF -- THE FIVE MONTH-OLD VEHICLE FOR ORGANIZING THE NON-GAULLIST MAJORITY PARTIES INTO A COHERENT POLITICAL FORCE AT THE SERVICE OF GISCARD. THE PR LEADERSHIP HAS THE RIGHT TO BE PROUD OF ITS FIRST YEAR.

2. ELECTION OF BLANC AS SECRETARY GENERAL: THE SELECTION OF BLANC BY THE PR'S POLITICAL LEADERS TO HEAD THE PARTY IS A SIGN OF THEIR DESIRE TO CHANGE THE PARTY'S IMAGE IN ORDER TO INCREASE ITS POPULAR APPEAL. HERETOFORE DOMINATED BY MEN OF WEALTH AND POWER -- PONIATOWSKI, D'ORNANO, BONNET, DOMINATI, AS WELL AS LOCAL NOTABLES -- THE GISCARDIANS HAVE HAD DIFFICULTY IN ESTABLISHING A MASS CONSTITUENCY. JACQUES BLANC (NICKNAMED COLOMBO AFTER THE AMERICAN TV CHARACTER) COMES AS CLOSE TO THE ANTITHESIS OF THIS ARISTOCRATIC IMAGE AS ONE IS LIKELY TO FIND. BLANC IS ANIMATED AND EARTHY, WAS EDUCATED IN TOULOUSE, AND WHILE HE HAS SERVED AS A SECRETARY OF STATE, REMAINS VERY PROVINCIAL IN APPEARANCE AND MANNER. HE IS ALSO INTELLIGENT, HIGHLY CAPABLE AND TOTALLY LOYAL TO GISCARD. BLANC'S JOB IS NOW TO PROVIDE THE PARTY WITH A STYLE AND ACTIVISM MORE APPEALING TO THE DIVERSE FRENCH ELECTORATE.

3. ADHERENCE TO THE UDF -- A COMPROMISE: THE STATUTES OF THE UDF WERE DRAWN UP TO PERMIT MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN DEFINING THE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE CONSTITUENT POLITICAL PARTIES ON THE LOCAL LEVEL. WHILE RESISTANCE TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UDF-COMBINED ORGANIZATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL REMAINS FAIRLY ENTRENCHED AMONG SOME OF THE MORE TRADITIONAL, CONSERVATIVE PR CADRES, THE FLEXIBILITY OF THE UDF STATUTES IN DEFINING THIS RELATIONSHIP AS WELL AS PRESIDENT GISCARD'S CLEAR DESIRE (AND NEED) FOR THE UDF AS AN ELECTORAL MACHINE ENABLED THE PR LEADERS TO OBTAIN CONVENTION APPROVAL WITH A MINIMUM OF EFFORT. THIS FEAR OF INDIVIDUAL PARTY INTERESTS BEING SUBMERGED IN THE EFFORT TO BUILD A NATIONAL GISCARDIAN POLITICAL MACHINE HAS ALSO CROPPED UP AMONG SOME LOCAL CADRES OF THE CDS AND RADICAL PARTIES. EACH OF THE PARTIES HAS STRONGHOLDS WHERE LOCAL LEADERS FEAR THE USE OF THE UDF BY THEIR PARTNERS TO REBALANCE THE RELATIVE STRENGTHS. THUS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE UDF WILL VARY WIDELY DEPENDING ON LOCAL POLITICAL SITUATIONS AND THE INDIVIDUAL POLITICIANS (PR, CDS, RADICALS) INVOLVED.

4. RETURN OF THE BARONS: WHEN ASKED BY GISCARD TO

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CREATE THE PR, SOISSON AGREED TO DO SO ON THE CONDITION  
THAT HE BE GIVEN A FREE HAND -- I.E., NO INTERFERENCE OR  
COMPETITION FROM PONIATOWSKI, D'ORNANO, DOMINATI OR OTHER  
BARONS. DURING THE PAST YEAR, THEIR ROLE IN THE PR  
HAS BEEN MINIMAL. THEIR RETURN TO THE PARTY ACTIVITY WAS  
CLEARLY SIGNALLED BY THEIR PRESENCE ON THE PODIUM AND THE  
KEY SPEECHES THEY MADE AT THE CONVENTION. PONIATOWSKI'S  
SPEECH WAS PARTICULARLY INTERESTING AS (A) HE  
NOTED THAT IT WAS HE WHO ASKED BLANC TO TAKE THE JOB AND  
(B) HE DEFINED THE NATURE OF THE UDF, THE RELATIONSHIP  
OF THE PR TO THE UDF AND THE JUSTIFICATION FOR IT. HIS  
PRESENCE AND SPEECH INDICATE THE PR'S NEED TO KEEP THE  
MORE CONSERVATIVE WING OF THE PARTY IN LINE DURING THE  
PR'S EFFORT, ALONG WITH ITS CDS AND RADICAL PARTNERS, TO  
EXPAND THEIR BASE TOWARD THE CENTER-LEFT. WHILE BLANC  
AND HIS NEW TEAM WILL CONCENTRATE ON THE MECHANICS OF  
THE PARTY ORGANIZATION AND RELATIONS WITH THE UDF, THE  
BARONS EVIDENTLY PLAN TO PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE AS A  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS. TO WHAT EXTENT BLANC AND THE YOUNGER  
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GISCARDIAN LEADERS WILL FIND THIS A COMPATIBLE WORKING RELATIONSHIP REMAINS TO BE SEEN. THE FACT REMAINS, HOWEVER, THAT BOTH THE POWER OF THE BARONS AND THE FUTURE OF THE PARTY ARE TIED TO THE SUCCESS OF GISCARD, AND WHILE FRICTIONS WILL NO DOUBT ARISE, THE NEEDS OF THE PRESIDENT WILL TAKE THE HIGHEST PRIORITY.

5. BARRE TAKES A POSITION: AS OPPOSED TO HIS NEUTRALITY BETWEEN GAULLISTS AND GISCARDIANS WHICH HE SO CAREFULLY MAINTAINED PRIOR TO THE ELECTIONS (HE REFUSED GISCARD'S REQUEST TO HEAD THE UDF), BARRE, IN HIS APPEARANCE AND SPEECH AT FREJUS, CLEARLY PLACED HIMSELF IN THE UDF CAMP. HE CALLED ON THE PR DELEGATES TO SUPPORT FULLY THE UDF AS THE BEST MEANS TO AID THE PRESIDENT AND HIMSELF. IN THE SERIES OF SPEECHES AT FREJUS, THERE WAS ALMOST A TOTAL ABSENCE OF ANY REFERENCE TO THE PR -- EXCEPT IN BARRE'S. HE REFERRED TO THE RPR IN A SARCASTIC COMMENT, STATING THAT HIS PROGRAM OF BLOIS WOULD BE CARRIED OUT AND TOO BAD FOR THOSE WHO HAD IN THE PAST REFERRED TO IT AS THE LAST TESTAMENT OF AN OUTGOING GOVERNMENT OR A POLITICAL GAMBIT (RPR LEADER CHIRAC'S COMMENT IN A RADIO INTERVIEW IN NOVEMBER OF 1977). BARRE AGAIN HARPED ON A RESTRUCTURING OF THE FRENCH ECONOMY AS THE FIRST STEP IN IMPROVING ECONOMICND SOCL CONDITIONS IN FRANCE. THE RPR NEWSLETTER SUBSEQUENTLY NOTED BARRE'S SPEECH AND COMMENTED THAT THE RPR WOULD SUPPORT BARRE WHEN POSSIBLE BUT WOULD OPPOSE HIS PROPOSALS WHEN NECESSARY. BARRE'S IDENTIFICATION WITH THE UDF IS BOTH AN INDICATION OF HIS BELIEF IN ITS VIABILITYND A MEANS OF SOLIDIFYING ITS POLITICAL ROLE. IN THE INTRA-MAJORITY COMPETITION, BARRE HAS CLEARLY SIDED WITH THE UDF, EVEN THOUGH HE CONTINUES TO CONSULT REGULARLY WITH RPR PARLIAMENTARY LEADERS.

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6. A NEW MILITANCY?: JEAN-PIERRE SOISSON SUCCEEDED TO A REMARKABLE DEGREE DURING THE PAST YEAR IN DEVELOPING THE PR AS A POLITICAL PARTY. POST-ELECTORAL PR MEETINGS ATTENDED BY EMBOFFS HAVE EVIDENCED INCREASED MILITANCY BY LOCAL CADRES WHO NOW FEEL THAT THE PR UNDER GISCARD OFFERS REAL POTENTIAL FOR GROWTH AND POWER, PARTICULARLY GIVEN GISCARD'S PRESENTLY GOOD CHANCES FOR REELECTION IN 1981. IN CONTRAST TO THE PERIOD AFTER HIS ELECTION IN 1974, GISCARD IS NOW APPARENTLY TAKING AN ACTIVE INTEREST IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PR AND UDFND IS USING

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THE POWERS OF PATRONAGE AND GOVERNMENT LARGESS TO  
STRENGTHEN THEIR DEVELOPMENT. WHILE NOT YET THE EQUIVA-  
LENT OF THE PS OR RPR, THE UDF'S STAR IS CLEARLY ON THE  
RISE AND THE PR LEADERSHIP, THROUGH ITS DOMINANCE OF THE  
UDF, CLEARLY INTENDS TO MAKE THE GREATEST POSSIBLE USE  
OF IT. CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE CONSTITUENT PARTIES MAY  
ARISE ON THE LOCAL LEVEL, BUT GISCARD, BARRE, BLANC,  
PONIATOWSKI (AS WELL AS THE LEADERS OF THE CDS AND THE  
RADICALS) ARE EMPHASIZING TO THE MILITANTS THE NEED FOR  
COMBINED ACTION TO GAIN A LARGER PIE FOR ALL TO SHARE.  
THIS PROMISE IS HAVING ITS EFFECT AND THE PR APPEARS TO  
BE ON THE WAY TO FULFILLING ITS LONG-STATED GOAL OF  
CREATING A STRONG NATIONAL ORGANIZATION.

7. CONCLUSION: COMBINING THE PLEASURE OF BIRTHDAY  
PARTY AND VICTORY CELEBRATION WITH THE TRAN-  
SATION OF REQUIRED BUSINESS, THE CONVENTION WENT SMOOTH-  
LY. THE PR IS THE POLITICAL MACHINE OF PRESIDENT GISCA-  
RD AND THAT IS BOTH ITS STRENGTH AND ITS WEAKNESS. TO  
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THE EXTENT GISCARD AND HIS GOVERNMENT RETAIN POPULARITY AND SUPPORT, THE PR'S FUNCTION IS ALMOST MECHANICAL. POLICY DECISIONS ARE MADE BY THE GOVERNMENT, WITH THE PR LIMITED TO RECRUITING MEMBERS AND TURNING OUT VOTERS. UNLIKE THE RPR OR PS, OR EVEN ITS UD/ PARTNERS, THE PR HAS NO IN-HOUSE POLICY-MAKING ROLE OR CAPACITY. EVEN DECISIONS ON PURELY POLITICAL STRATEGY WILL APPARENTLY BE TAKEN BY THE GISCARDIAN BARONS WHO WILL RETAIN THE POWER WHILE REMAINING OUTSIDE OF THE PARTY STRUCTURE. THE PR/UDF HAS A HIGH GROWTH POTENTIAL EVEN THOUGH (OR PERHAPS BECAUSE) IT DEPENDS HEAVILY ON ONE FACTOR: GISCARD IN THE ELYSEE.  
HARTMAN

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